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ABSTRACT

Since 1970, Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), in Washington, D.C., has conducted programs to train and place disadvantaged women in nontraditional jobs. The results have been record-breaking: high placement rates, high job retention rates, good starting salaries, and upward mobility for women who seemed doomed to a life of poverty and dependence. This guide describes WOW's program and details what the organizers have learned in the process of conducting the program, as an outline and an incentive for other groups to design and implement such programs. Following an introduction that recounts WOW's successful training and placement of formerly disadvantaged women in such occupations as carpentry, electronics technology, and auto mechanics, the guide is divided into three main sections. The first section explains how the program was started, including forming an industry advisory committee, funding, budget, staffing the program, and selecting the trainees. The second section describes the program in action, including employment resources, classroom and laboratory instruction, counseling, and evaluation procedures. The final section, on jobs, discusses trainee placement and the work of the industry advisory committee, the public information specialist, and the employment resources specialist. An epilogue describes the formation of an alumnae association by the WOW graduates and their happiness at their new-found success. (KC)

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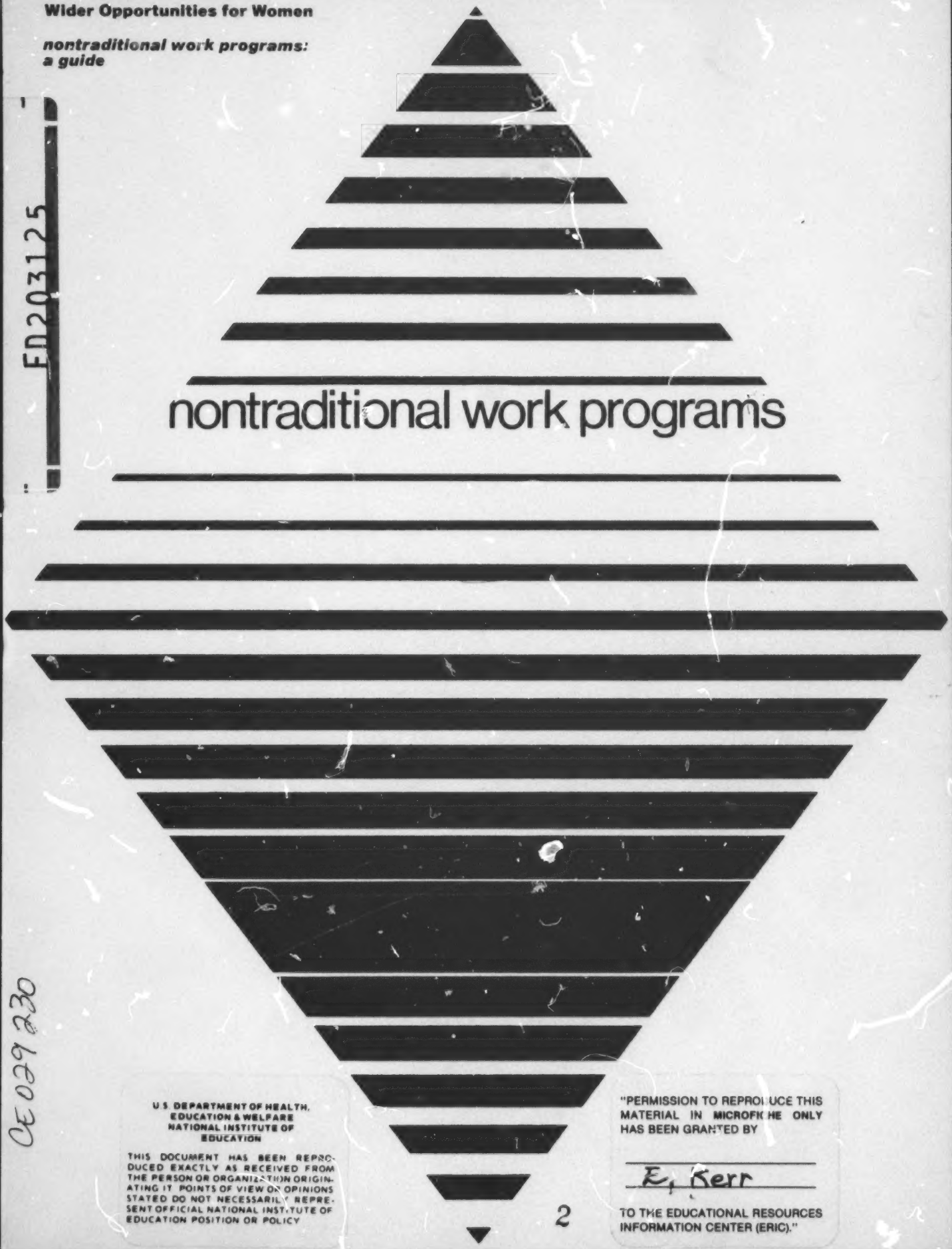
Wider Opportunities for Women

nontraditional work programs: a guide



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Wider
Opportunities
for Women
Training for
nontraditional
jobs

WOW'S NONTRADITIONAL WORK PROGRAMS:

A GUIDE

A Project of
Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc.

Funded by the District of Columbia
Department of Labor

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Prologue

"I'm the mother of three children, ages 13, 10, and 8. I'm also a divorcee.

I had been on welfare for about nine years and had no work experience other than two summer jobs and working in a small grocery store for two years. Knowing this, I knew that if I went to apply for a job, the best thing that I would come out with would be something in a restaurant or child care. I'm thinking that if everything goes well my older son should graduate from the twelfth grade at the age of 17. That gives me about four years to get myself in a better position.

I don't know where my strength came from all of a sudden, but I wanted to get out of the house and start working. I stopped down to the school to check on the children and ran into Mrs. Selmar (my son's teacher). While talking she could

tell that I really wanted to be helped and she referred me to CETA. I failed the test the first time but went back later and took it again. I was determined not to let those four years catch up with me. I figured that now is the big chance. (Now or Never).

The training program I went to was WOW. At WOW the instructors are concerned; they are all pulling for you and will go as far as necessary to see that you make it. There was something about this program that I really loved and that is, there's no such thing as a failure. Everyone is a winner. After taking the course of Electro Mechanics for seven months, I then felt that I had accomplished the training.

In September, I started to work for _____ company putting the _____machine together. My straight salary was $5.96 an hour plus $1.47 for the cost of living per hour and 40¢ night differential, which comes out to $7.83 an hour, $62.64 a day, and $313.20 a week. Now I am very proud of myself because I was 80¢ short in one week of what welfare was paying me in a month.

I am still taking time out to think and stay ahead of myself. I can't say exactly what the future holds for me but I can say that WOW's a winner, and you too can be a winner. Just hang in there long enough to hit the jackpot. Bingo!"

Introduction

Since 1970 Wider Opportunities for Women has conducted programs to train and place disadvantaged women in nontraditional jobs. The results have been record-breaking: high placement rates, high job retention rates, good starting salaries and upward mobility for women who seemed doomed to a life of poverty and dependence. This guide will provide an outline of what WOW has learned in the process.

Why the Programs Are Needed

The median earnings of full-time, year-round female workers are only 59 percent of the earnings of male workers. Though women have been entering the work force in increasing numbers, there has been no improvement in the relative wages of women for the last 20 years. Yet many women are totally responsible for their own financial support and that of their families.

Occupational segregation by sex is a major factor in the overall low status of women in the labor force. The greatest number of women workers are still found in only five "women's" occupations: elementary school teacher, sales clerk, secretary, bookkeeper and waitress. While there is a need for skilled workers in many technical fields and the skilled trades, most women lack the training and do not qualify for these openings.

Why the Programs Work

WOW works closely with industry and unions to design programs that will meet both the needs of the women trainees and the needs of potential employers. A number of factors have contributed to the effectiveness of the programs:

- -WOW identifies specific kinds of work, and then designs the training to fit the need.
- -An intensive training period in basic math, mechanics and electronics gives women the skills for entry-level trainee positions in many technical fields previously closed to them.
- -Women's technical capacities are not being tapped. These women have proven they can be strongly motivated by the prospect of good jobs and higher pay at the end of the training.
- -Employers and unions, aware of a critical need for skilled workers, have worked hand-in-hand with WOW in the design and operation of the programs.
- -Affirmative action legislation is beginning to produce results; employers and unions are increasingly seeking women workers in previously male-dominated fields.

As described in this guide, WOW has trained and placed more than 200 women as electronics technicians, telephone installers, overhead line mechanics, carpenters, auto mechanics, and service and repair technicians. WOW's placement rate of 80 percent and job retention rate of 90 percent is a strong indication of the success of the training.

WOW is keenly aware of the need for many more women to receive this kind of training. Such programs are a very small investment when seen in the light of the average woman's more than 30 productive years in the work force. Today, there is little recognition of the fact that compensatory employment programs for women must be tailored to women's special needs and circumstances. The program model described in this guide demonstrates the benefits and cost effectiveness of such special programs.

I. Starting The Program

Forming an Industry Advisory Committee

WOW sought to involve industry in the initial design of the program to insure that the training would be targeted to actual jobs and would meet employers' needs. Exploratory meetings with a representative of IBM, who had been "lent" to the program, were followed by an invitation to other businesses and several unions to assist in designing the program. An Industry Advisory Committee was formed and a joint effort was made to identify specific jobs for women. As the program developed, industry and union representatives made substantial in-kind contributions. Over an initial 12-month period, committee members donated a documented $75,000 in the following kinds of support, some of which have continued in the current programs:

Instructors. Some of the classes are taught by industry instructors on loan to the program. The industry instructors help the trainees, as well as the program staff, to evaluate the training from the employer's perspective.

Equipment. Committee members donate tools, training equipment, and repairable business machines such as scales, typewriters and portable meters. Such equipment is an essential part of the hands-on laboratory experience.

Office Space. During the first days of the program, an industry member contributed space for the entire program: classrooms, labs and administrative offices.

Outreach And Public Information. One industry member donated the services of professional photographers. Others have sent speakers to discuss the realities of the job market. One corporation produced an award-winning videotape about the program that has helped to generate wide interest in the business community. Many members have published articles about the program in their own industrial and trade union magazines and newsletters.

Forming an Industry Advisory Committee

Advisory Committee members have become increasingly enthusiastic program participants and supporters as they interact with the staff and watch the progress of the trainees. Though not obligated to hire trainees upon completion of the program, many of them have done so.

WOW's current Industrial Advisory Committee consists of:

AT&T
C & P Telephone Company
Capital Institute of Technology
IBM
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
McGraw-Hill Continuing Education Center
PEPCO
Pitney Bowes
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America
Washington Gas Light Company

Funding

The WOW program has been funded by a CETA grant from the District of Columbia Department of Labor. Government is the prime--and most likely--source of funding for training and employment programs, but not necessarily the only source. In each community, it is advisable to consult with the local Department of Labor or employment security office. Funds from foundations and the private sector can also be solicited. The development work at WOW is the responsibility of both organization and program staff, particularly the program director. In any organization this task should be the responsibility of those who have a vision of the overall program and organizational plan.

WOW's contracts have been awarded on a 12-month basis, but multi-year funding would have decided advantages. A three-year grant would permit program administrators to devote more time to the challenges of managing the program and would enable the funding source to do long-term observation and evaluation.

Budget

The program budget breaks down as follows:

65% for salaries and fringe benefits (the mark of a labor intensive program)
10% for direct costs such as books, tools, materials and travel
12% for management and administrative costs
13% for overhead
100%

Since CETA contracts are usually written on a cost-reimbursement basis, there is often a cash flow problem that stems from late payments from the funding source. A cash reserve should be available, or arrangements made with a bank to cover temporary cash shortages (which is what WOW has had to do).

Policy decisions about staff salaries and salary increases during the contract period need to be made by the program operators when the budget is drawn up. Such issues are not the province of the funder; they are part of the assumptions the funding agency accepts when it issues the contract.

WOW's costs-per-trainee have ranged from $2,000 to $7,000 depending on the length of the training and whether outside tuition payments are involved (as in the case of advanced electronics training). These figures do not include the CETA stipend each trainee receives from the D.C. Department of Labor during the training period.

Staffing The Program

WOW has developed a strong and cohesive staff. Staff members have clearly defined functions and areas of responsibility, yet they work closely together to make the program function well.

Management and Administrative Staff. The management and administrative staff for program operations consists of a director, deputy director, support staff, coordinator of program services, program assistant and information specialist.

Director. The Director is the major spokesperson for the program. She acts as liaison with the outside community, maintains a productive relationship with the Industry Advisory Committee, secures funding, and develops proposals for the future. In addition, she must exercise strong management skills to supervise the internal organization of the program.

Deputy Director. The Deputy Director is responsible for the day-to-day program operation, coordinating the employment resources, classroom and laboratory instruction, and counseling components. She is in charge of overall curriculum development in conjunction with the instructional staff, industry instructors and union instructors. She supervises on-site program staff, and recommends adjustments to the program to meet the on-going needs of the trainees.

Coordinator of Program Services. The Coordinator of Program Services must be very familiar with all aspects of the program and the requirements of each of the funding agencies. She is responsible for personnel management and statistical evaluation. She implements budget and financial procedures and supervises payment of allowances to trainees.

Program Information Specialist. The Program Information Specialist is primarily responsible for outreach to potential trainees, employers, women's groups, community-based organizations, government agencies, and the media. She prepares news releases, assists with conferences, arranges interviews and handles requests for information.

Support Staff. The Support Staff provides essential services to both management staff and program instructors.

In addition, WOW's Nontraditional Work Programs draw on the resources of the parent organization, Wider Opportunities For Women, in a number of ways:

Executive Director. The Executive Director of WOW provides the necessary liaison and coordination between the parent organization and these model programs. She explains WOW's projects and goals to the community, develops support for the programs, and oversees the program's general direction and development.

Finance Officer. WOW's Finance Officer is responsible for the program budget and for financial reporting requirements.

Planning and Development Specialist. The Planning and Development Specialist and the Coordinator of Information Services of the parent organization stay in close touch with the Nontraditional Work Programs, relating them to future planning and development efforts and to WOW's overall public information activities.

When a program is operating on its own without these resources from a parent organization, the responsibilities of the staff will increase substantially. They will have to spend more time explaining the program to the community, developing support, meeting budgetary and financial reporting requirements, working on future funding and carrying out public information activities.

Program Staff. A great deal of attention is devoted to selecting Program Staff--counselors, employment resources specialists and instructors. Each must have a good understanding of the philosophy, methods and design of the training program and a commitment to and understanding of nontraditional work for women.

WOW's staff has a strong belief that participants in the program can be motivated to change and an equally strong belief that institutions (schools, businesses, government and unions) are also capable of undergoing change. WOW has sought to build a balanced staff--women and men, Blacks, Whites and Hispanics--so that the trainees have the opportunity to work with all kinds of people.

It is important that each staff member be willing and able to assume a variety of roles. While staff members have areas of specialization, they are often called upon to do more than one job.

The Counselor. The counselor meets with trainees in individual counseling sessions, but also serves as a classroom teacher, teaching a course in human relations skills.

The Employment Resources Specialist. The employment resources specialist is responsible for workshops that prepare the trainees in job-related issues ranging from interview techniques to the actual skills required for a particular nontraditional job. These specialists also work with potential employers both to build up the job bank and to make sure that each trainee has the opportunity for a job after completing the program.

The Classroom Instructor. The classroom instructor works with the trainees in both a laboratory and classroom setting. His/her major challenge is to make sure that the basic skills taught are those that are necessary for the particular job each trainee is working toward. Each instructor is a specialist in a particular area, i.e., math, electricity, mechanics, etc.

WOW has found that the "ideal" staff has the following characteristics:

-commitment to bring about change
-mastery of a particular program area
-creativity
-independence
-flexibility
-innovation
-a sense of adventure
-previous experience that is compatible with a nontraditional training program

The staff is ofter called upon to respond to the individual needs of the women in the program. WOW's staff members have developed many of their own curricula and materials but have also adapted existing materials to the special needs of the trainees.

The classroom instructors know how important it is to be able to combat the trainees' frustration and fear of learning. Although some of the WOW trainees have completed high school or have attended some college classes, the majority are not high school graduates. The staff has helped many of the students pass the high school equivalency exam (GED).

Trainees appreciate the fact that some of the women on WOW's staff have worked at nontraditional jobs. As a recent trainee put it, "When Jane teaches a class I always learn something. I know she's made it out there doing this work and I can make it too."

Selecting The Trainees

In a very real sense, the training program is only as good as its participants--the trainees. WOW has worked hard to develop sound recruitment policies and selection criteria for determining the potential of each applicant.

The D.C. Department of Labor recruits and does initial screening of WOW applicants on the basis of standard CETA eligibility criteria and an expressed interest in nontraditional training. CETA requires that applicants be 18 years old, residents of the local Prime Sponsor's jurisdiction, economically disadvantaged and unemployed or underemployed. If accepted for training, participants are provided a weekly stipend by the D.C. Department of Labor.

Applicants who meet DOL's CETA elibigility criteria and who demonstrate ability to read and do math at the 7-9th grade level (depending upon the demands of individual skills training areas) are referred to WOW for a second interview.

WOW intake counselors explain the program requirements and activities in detail in order to help applicants determine whether or not they wish to enroll. Since most of the applicants have a low self-image and a spotty work history, WOW staff screens primarily for the woman's potential for being motivated and for her interest in nontraditional work. In this second intake interview, WOW staff assesses the initial screening done by the local DOL and offers a second opinion based on a program-specific evaluation. The additional information presented is beneficial for the trainee, as it affords her a second opportunity to evaluate the program's offerings in terms of her own personal goals.

The intake counselors have developed an interview questionnaire that seeks answers to the following kinds of questions:

-is the woman able to accept working where she will be a definite sexual minority?
-has she had any previous experience in nontraditional jobs?
-has she worked alongside family members in carpentry, construction, repairing family autos, doing home repair?
-can she lift and carry heavy objects?
-does she drive?
-does she handle her own home repairs--ranging from hanging pictures to fixing small or large appliances?

Responses to the above (or similar) questions help the intake counselors evaluate the previous experience of the candidate and determine what her chances of success might be. The interviewer looks for a strong cooperative attitude and potentially good staying power.

On the whole, WOW has been fortunate in selecting trainees. Those recommended by the intake counselors have usually had the capability and motivation to make it through the training program. Inevitably, however, some trainees have been accepted into the program who have later been asked to leave due to excessive absences, persistent tardiness, failure to do assignments, or lack of cooperation with other trainees and/or staff.

II. The Program In Action

When a woman enrolls in a training program it is likely she has already suffered many defeats and feels discouraged. However, a well conceived and effectively run program can:

-turn a negative self-image into a positive one;
-prepare women for nontraditional jobs that will offer them a higher salary, better job security and an opportunity for advancement;
-provide women the chance to work at a job that is intellectually and physically challenging and satisfying.

WOW has found that, to be successful, a training program aimed at employment needs to include three components:

-Employment Resources Services
-Classroom and Laboratory Skills Instruction
-Counseling and Support Services

Participants receive training in these three areas (described below) simultaneously throughout the program. The overall courses vary in length from 3-12 months, depending upon the training required for the particular job. It may take 12 months to train an electronics technician and less time to train a woman to be a construction worker, since most of her training will be done on the job. Each training course is, however, broken down into small modules of 4-6 weeks in which various aspects of the curriculum are emphasized.

Employment Resources

The employment resources staff works with prospective employers to (1) clearly define job skill requirements, (2) locate positions for trainees and (3) match trainees to the jobs for which they are best suited. Employment Resources Specialists also serve as classroom instructors, schooling trainees on the requirements of the job search and the world of work.

All trainees who have worked with the employment resources staff should be able to:

-be knowledgeable about the local job market
-evaluate want ads
-know how to fill out a job application accurately
-find out what a particular job entails
-dress appropriately for a job interview
-conduct an effective interview
-evaluate whether she has been treated fairly at the interview
-evaluate the prospective job
-assess the fringe benefits that are offered

Like the other components of the program, Employment Resources is also arranged in modules. In the first two-month module, classes are organized around the topics of motivation (or why people work) and past employment experiences.

Trainees go on to learn the requirements of technical jobs. They write to companies for information about careers in technical fields. This strengthens their writing skills and their ability to ask appropriate questions clearly. They learn how to be assertive (in a positive way) in occupations that have been previously barred to women.

In job development classes trainees read magazines and newspapers to learn about new industries and to begin looking for potential jobs. The trainees begin to learn the scope and breadth of technical occupations, common job titles and the kind of work associated with particular titles. The employment resources staff asks the women to list their current skills and add the skills they will need to master to succeed in technical work.

In later modules, the trainees discuss various types of application forms as well as other forms they might be required to fill out. Many of the women have difficulty in understanding what information is required and just how much information they should give.

Subsequent modules discuss appropriate dress for different kinds of job interviews. For example, a job interview in a downtown office requires one mode of dress, an interview at a construction site a different one. For many of the trainees, the job interview they go to at the end of training is their first. WOW has found role playing is invaluable as a way for trainees to practice interview situations. The staff asks the class to evaluate the positive points of the performance and the trainee herself to evaluate the points which need strengthening. This technique illustrates the emphasis of the Employment Resources component: to build self-esteem through group support.

While the overall goal is to build lifetime job finding skills, the trainees know that the program will provide supportive help even after graduation.

Classroom and Laboratory Instruction

WOW has designed an educational component that balances the needs of the trainee with the needs of the employers. Many aspects of the curriculum are hard and fast, but others cannot be, since the total training component is based on a careful and thorough evaluation of the trainees' skills at the point of entry into the program, as well as the demands of the current job market. The curriculum includes academic subjects as well as skills training. WOW's core curriculum for all nontraditional jobs includes:

-math
-communications
-principles of electricty
-principles of mechanics
-driver education (for those who do not have a license)
-job finding skills (discussed in the section related to Employment Resources)
-physical conditioning

For each of the above courses, there is an introductory 4-6 week module during which the instruction concentrates on the basics. Each successive module is more difficult and comprehensive than the preceeding one. Instruction in each class is geared to the individual trainee, and an individualized method of instruction is used whenever possible. Classes are organized to maximize individual success and minimize failure. It is important to remember that the majority of women enrolled in the program have had little success with school. The primary job of the teaching staff is to create a supportive learning environment that encourages trainee participation and provides opportunities for the trainee to experience academic success.

Class size is important. It is best if the trainees are divided into teams to insure small classes (15 or fewer if possible). The team format encourages smaller support groups within the larger training class and creates a stronger sense of identity for the trainees. Each team follows its own schedule of classwork, laboratory and on-the-job experiences.

One standard which is closely maintained is arrival and departure time. WOW has found that the trainees must get used to following a schedule and arriving at places on time. They are required to punch in when they arrive, as they would on a job, and to punch out at the end of their eight hour day. Unexcused absences and lateness are charged against them and are deducted from their weekly stipend.

Relating Curriculum to the Work World. The curriculum topics that follow are most useful in the first module--the module that stresses fundamentals. Successive modules can be more job-specific and, if possible, developed in conjunction with area employers. WOW's Industry Advisory Committee and other area employers participate in curriculum development. It has also been beneficial to ask employers to provide instructors to teach in regular classroom settings and in the laboratories.

When this could not be arranged on a regular basis, however, employers have been invited to send guest lecturers or seminar leaders. These seminars and lectures have been beneficial to both employers and trainees. Potential employers have an opportunity to interact with the trainees, watch their development and become sensitive to their concerns. These exchanges with the world of work expand the trainees' experiences and permit them to question employers about employer expectations, particular jobs to be filled, and the difficulties women have when applying for technical, nontraditional employment.

Not all sessions need to feature employers. Seminars can also present community social services and health workers who can speak on community services, employment in the community and educational opportunities available after completion of the training program.

Career and community-oriented speakers provide another kind of role model for the women in the program. The trainees can see that people who have "made it" in the world of work care about sharing what they know with those who are still learning.

Basic Math. The basic math curriculum focuses on:

-addition
-multiplication
-powers of ten
-fractions
-percentages
-dimensions
-the use of equations

The math program is designed to relate math concepts to everyday happenings and then to specific jobs. It is important for all the trainees to display knowledge of basic math skills and to be competent problem solvers. Later modules present more advanced mathematical concepts and relate to the math requirements of specific kinds of work. For example, the most important math requirement for a carpenter is to be able to "read the rule," whereas an electronics technician must know inverse equations.

Communication Skills. Communication skills classes focus on:

-reading comprehension
-vocabulary development
-listening skills
-problem solving

Trainees need to build their confidence in situations where they can use the reading skills they already possess. Many adults who characterize themselves as "poor readers" are not poor readers at all, but rather do not have the confidence to tackle new or complicated technical materials; they have not developed proficient word-attack skills nor have they set realistic goals for themselves. Often you will hear, "I don't understand what I read," when in actuality an individual does remember and understand but simply does not remember all of the details. It is important to explain that people read for different purposes, i.e., it takes different skills to read and understand a novel than it does to read a technical electricity document and follow the directions. Both types of reading skills are developed and practiced in these classes.

Electricity and Mechanics. In electricity the following fundamental concepts are introduced:

-electric circuits
-direct currents
-wiring techniques
-circuitry
-drawings and illustrations

It is necessary to combine classroom work and laboratory experience in this course. One approach is to have the students meet as a group (in their respective teams) three times a week to review the readings and their homework, and then spend the other two days in a lab. At WOW, experience is provided by the participating industries and is supplemented with specific electric skills training. By the end of the program, each trainee should be able to wire, solder, read a meter, follow a schematic diagram, trouble shoot and be proficient in circuit assembly. These skills represent an amalgam of what has been learned in the classroom and laboratory.

The mechanics course offers instruction in:

-tool recognition
-tool usage
-machine assembly/disassembly and repair
-measurement techniques
-elementary physics

This course, like electricity, offers both classroom and laboratory training. Often, the course is taught in conjunction with the electricity course; when this happens the curricula are combined, and the course is taught by two instructors.

Driver Education. Driver education is different from the other courses since it may be necessary to contract out for instruction. WOW has found that it is well worth the effort to seek specific funding for it. Many women who enter the training program cannot drive, and/or do not own a car. Yet most nontraditional jobs require a driver's license. Future job sites will probably be far away from the trainees' homes and from public transportation. Having a license and being able to drive opens up options that would otherwise be closed to trainees. And since the women will at some point become financially more stable than they have ever been, the possibility of owning a car becomes a reality and not just a dream.

Physical Conditioning. Before entering the program trainees are required to be in good physical health. The physical conditioning curriculum has both physiological and psychological benefits. It stresses the following areas:

-physical fitness
-strength building and endurance
-nutrition

The exercise program increases in intensity and duration in each module. Four exercise systems are taught: isotonics, calisthenics, isometrics and isokinetics. The women are also required to lift weights and do other exercises to strengthen their arms and upper torsos. The material on nutrition deals with the relationship between a proper diet and a sound exercise program. As the trainees become more focused and their training becomes more job specific, the physical conditioning is geared to the physical requirements of each job.

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The Classroom Instructor. The classroom instructor works with the trainees in both a laboratory and classroom setting. His/her major challenge is to make sure that the basic skills taught are those that are necessary for the particular job each trainee is working toward. Each instructor is a specialist in a particular area, i.e., math, electricity, mechanics, etc.

Counseling

The counseling component is organized so that during the course of the training program each trainee participates in orientation sessions, individual counseling sessions and group counseling.

WOW's counseling team includes a coordinator and counselors, all of whom help the trainees cope more effectively with the variety of job related problems encountered in their daily lives.

The overall model that has been used successfully is called "partialized" problem solving--an approach that permeates all aspects of the counseling component. This approach can be broken down into four parts:

-the first step is to help the trainees identify just what the larger problem really is;
-the second step divides the larger complex problem into small manageable segments;
-the third step helps the trainee decide which of the above small segments is most inhibiting and, if solved, would have the greatest impact on the total situation;
-the fourth step focuses on determining possible solutions to some of these smaller issues. In thinking through these solutions, the trainee is asked to keep in mind the effect the solution will have on the total situation.

The partialized problem-solving model works as well in a group situation as it does in an individual counseling session. It allows the trainee and the counselor to analyze problems and concerns so that the trainee can begin to successfully identify and solve problems, make decisions, handle difficult choices and meet many of the challenges that will be encountered in her increasingly demanding work life.

The overall goals of the partialized problem-solving model of counseling are as follows:

-to build on the experience, knowledge and skills that each trainee possesses;
-to improve problem solving skills;
-to help trainees feel confident to handle new experiences;
-to provide trainees with a wide range of options for resolving problems;
-to allow women to make conscious and informed choices about their personal goals;
-to provide opportunities to test out newly acquired knowledge and skills through simulated and real life situations.

A necessary adjunct to individual sessions is developed early in the program:

-the building of a support group that can focus on the specific vocational, educational and personal problems experienced by many trainees enrolled in the program.

In all counseling, the staff provides the necessary encouragement and support to women who are taking this major career step. The counseling team keeps in close communication with the instructors and the employment resources staff so that the most comprehensive view of the trainee's development can be maintained.

Counseling

The counseling component is organized so that during the course of the training program each trainee participates in orientation sessions, individual counseling sessions and group counseling.

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Orientation Counseling. The first module is primarily concerned with orientation counseling. It is during this time that the trainee is introduced to all phases of the training program. The primary focus of this phase is to help the trainee identify individual problems, needs and career goals. WOW has developed a series of activities and games that help the trainees establish new friendships with others in their group. All the trainees are initially apprehensive; it is important that each knows these feelings are not unique to her. Not only does this process help during the training program, but it also gives the trainees social tools for entering other new situations; i.e., job interviews, first day on a new job, in a new neighborhood, etc.

The orientation counseling module also presents the trainees with a series of questionnaires. These require the trainees to think through their attitudes toward nontraditional work and examine the attitudes of their parents, friends and peers toward this type of work. The questionnaires are useful in helping the trainees to identify and evaluate their personality characteristics, values and goals, aptitudes and interests. In addition, they serve as the basis of both group and individual counseling sessions in later modules. The questionnaire results also help the trainees:

-assess and relate their skills, goals and values to the goals of the training program.
-understand more clearly their current and long-range goals in relation to nontraditional work.

Individual and Group Counseling. The individual counseling sessions focus primarily on job-related personal problems such as:

-child care
-transportation
-attendance
-previous involvement with the criminal justice system
-referrals to community resources--health care, schools, food stamps
-any concern or problem that the individual trainee wishes to discuss

The group sessions are geared to the development of common life skills, particularly to coping with the special challenges to women entering nontraditional work. These sessions encourage the trainees to begin adjusting to a career that is going to be both physically and psychologically very difficult.

WOW's counseling program provides support but aims at independence. Trainees must begin to feel that they can eventually solve their problems alone, although the indirect support of counselors and peers is also present.

Evaluation Procedure

Evaluation is an integral part of the program. There are regular opportunities for staff to evaluate trainees and for the trainees to evaluate the program and its effectiveness.

At the end of each two-month module a trainee is evaluated by all of her instructors and counselors. The assessment consists of both a written evaluation form and a follow-up discussion of the form. WOW has found this two-month evaluation procedure to be most effective and helpful. The instructors are guided in part by the results of classroom tests held regularly during the module.

At the end of each three month period, trainees evaluate the program: classroom instruction, laboratory work, opportunities for hands-on experiences and personal growth. This evaluation is important for three reasons: it allows the trainee to reflect on her experience in the program thus far; it provides feedback to each instructor on her/his effectiveness as a teacher; and it helps determine whether the workload and level of difficulty in each course has been appropriate. Some of the courses in the WOW program have been modified as a result of this trainee feedback.

After completing training, participants are asked to answer another questionnaire. WOW uses the results to assess the trainee's response to the entire program. In reflecting on their experience, trainees gain insight into the standards future employers will use in evaluating them, both in job interviews and after they are hired.

In summary, WOW uses the following evaluation schedule:

-at the end of the two-month module all instructors and counselors evaluate the trainee.
-at the end of each three-month period the trainee evaluates the program.
-at the completion of training the trainee responds to another questionnaire evaluating her response to the program and her career goals.

III. The Bottom Line Is Jobs

Placing The Trainees

The bottom line is jobs, but there is much more to job placement than making sure that each trainee is employed by the end of the training program. The search for appropriate work should not be the responsibility of a single staff member. At WOW, job placement is jointly carried out by:

-the Industry Advisory Committee
-the Public Information Specialist
-the Employment Resources staff
-the Trainee

With these components working together efficiently, WOW has been able to place women in a wide variety of nontraditional jobs.

-auto repairers
-office machine repairers
-electrical installers
-carpenters
-electricians
-TV technicians
-generator sub-station attendants
-shop mechanics
-overhead line installers

How are these jobs identified? How are they secured? What exactly can the Industry Advisory Committee, the public information specialist, the former trainees and the employment resources staff do in conjunction with the trainees to successfully reach the bottom line--jobs?

Industry Advisory Committee

The Industry Advisory Committee members know the job market in their particular areas. They provide information about available jobs, and which companies are willing to hire women for nontraditional jobs. Some of the members of WOW's Industry Advisory Committee have wanted to set an example and have become "pioneer employers." Several members have successfully placed WOW trainees in jobs that had never before been filled by women.

Public Information Specialist

The role of the public information specialist is to get the word out to the community about the existence of this unique training and employment program. This includes information about program goals, training procedures (both classroom and on-site training), the availability of the staff trainers to keep in contact with the employees, and the success of women performing well in nontraditional jobs.

WOW's public information specialist has reached out in the following ways:

-cooperated with a major corporation in the production of a 15-minute videotape on the program;
-visited schools, local Chambers of Commerce and employer associations to tell them of the program;
-contacted area-wide business people and unions about the program;
-issued regular press releases to report on the progress points in the program, job-site experiences of the trainees (current and former), and training program cycles;
-assisted in preparing an information booklet for distribution to employers (current and potential), unions, public officials, the media and high school guidance counselors. It includes a narrative description of the program, photographs of the many facets of the program, and a brief explanation of the program's potential impact on the job market;
-organized seminars that brought together government representatives, business people, career specialists, women's advocacy representatives and training managers;
-provided opportunities for the trainees to talk about the program. They often prove to be their own best spokespersons in describing the impact of the program on their lives, their families and their standard of living.

Employment Resources Specialist

In addition to conducting classes, the employment resources specialist is called upon to:

-arrange field trips to many different working places
-support independent job searching
-help in setting up interviews
-arrange job information seminars and make sure the trainees know who is coming to speak, what will be discussed and where and when the session will be held.

In working with the employers, employment resources staff are required to:

-screen the applicants to make sure that they are well suited for the particular job--in terms of both skills and credentials (e.g., high school diploma, GED certificate)
-arrange job interviews--invite employers to come to the program (or have the program go to the employers)
-notify employers about particular trainees.

The employment resources staff must be able to work effectively and efficiently with both trainees and employers. The ability to coordinate all aspects of job placement is crucial.

The employment resources staff continually evaluates the trainees, both during the training program and during the first year on the job.

During training.

-as the trainee begins job interviews, an evaluation form is sent to all instructors. This information is helpful to prospective employers;
-the evaluation results are discussed with the trainees--both strengths and weaknesses;
-trainees are evaluated after each job interview and the interview results are discussed with the trainees.

After job placement.

-one month after the trainee has been placed, a written evaluation is solicited from the employer or immediate supervisor;
-the trainee is asked for her assessment of the job situation; any problems mentioned by the supervisor or employer are discussed at this time;
-after six months, a questionnaire is sent to the employer;
-at this point the trainee is again asked to give an oral evaluation of herself;
-after 12 months the trainee is sent a written questionnaire, with space for her to report on her experiences on the job as well as in her personal life.

The above checkpoints are suggested as timely evaluation points, but an evaluation calendar that suits the needs of a particular program should be developed. Both the trainee and the employer should know that the employment resources staff is always available to help them through rough spots. For example, the trainee is told that she can continue to ask for help with problems of child care, transportation or personal relationships that may have come about due to her new work and status. The employer can also come to the employment resources specialist if a sudden change takes place in the trainee's work or if it seems that some additional training-related information is needed on the new employee.

A job may become available before a trainee finishes the training program. If a woman is "job-ready," regardless of where she is in the program, she will be offered the opportunity to apply for the position. However, a trainee may want to stay in the training program so that she can complete her training and aim at a technically more demanding job. Trainees who enter the program with some nontraditional work experience may be able to accept employment earlier, but no hard and fast rule can be given on this matter. The best approach is to be sensitive to each trainee and each job situation.

The employment resources staff stays in touch with the "graduates." Former trainees can serve as role models and a source of information about new jobs in their work place, they can provide timely information about the job market and, more specifically, talk about what it is like for a woman to work in a nontraditional job.

IV. Epilogue

Here the story ends for the first phase of WOW's program, but for the women already trained and for those who have yet to enter the program, the story is just beginning.

The graduates know that as well. Their commitment to changing the lives of other women has not diminished because they themselves have "made it." New on-the-job and personal experiences have helped them realize that WOW's support is needed long after a woman is on the job.

The happy ending? WOW's trainees have formed the Wider Opportunities for Women Alumni Association.

Their aim is to provide women in training and future graduates with information about jobs, transportation and subsequent training and career opportunities. On a voluntary basis, they have made themselves available to the staff as "sisters" to those who need counseling and as resource people for lectures, classes and training situations. They will also work to inform the community about the program and will point out the need for high school students and other women to have access to this kind of training.

In a letter to the Mayor of Washington, D.C., the president of the WOW Alumni Association noted, "We made some lasting friends among the WOW staff, coworkers and instructors. They have all given their time and understanding to help each of us attain our goals... Wider Opportunities for Women works. It has something for everyone."